

UN interventions: The role of geography

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Abstract This paper argues that UN military interventions are geographically biased. For every 1,000 kilometers of distance from the three permanent Western UNSC members (France, UK, US), the probability of a UN military intervention decreases by 4 percent. We are able to rule out several alternative explanations for the distance finding, such as differences by continent, colonial origin, bilateral trade relationships, foreign aid flows, political regime forms, or the characteristics of the Cold War. We do not observe this geographical bias for non-military interventions, providing evidence that practical considerations could be important factors for UNSC decisions to intervene militarily. In fact, UNSC interventions are also more likely in smaller and poorer countries – both of which are indications of less costly interventions and higher chances of success, everything else equal.

Keywords United Nations · Conflict resolution · International organizations

The whole basis of the United Nations is the right of all nations – great or small – to have weight, to have a vote, to be attended to, to be a part of the twentieth century. Adlai E. Stevenson

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1 Introduction

Why does the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) decide to intervene in some conflicts but not in others? For a long time, UN military interventions, and especially non-interventions, have been subject to criticism from the international community. For example, consider the hesitant UN actions surrounding the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Then Secretary General Kofi Annan later admitted that “the international community failed Rwanda.”¹ However, other contemporary conflicts, such as the Yugoslav wars, have received much greater attention from the UN. Would the treatment of Rwanda have been different if the country was located in Europe?

This paper tries to shed light on the factors associated with UN military interventions, particularly focusing on the geographical component in relation to the five permanent UNSC members (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US). Previously, numerous observers have criticized the predominant role of the five permanent UNSC members (e.g., Childers 1994, or Rajan 2006). In theory, the geographical proximity to these powers should not be related to the probability of UN interventions, because one of the main UN guidelines advocates its role of keeping peace *throughout the world*. The following pages suggest otherwise.

Recently, evidence for biased decisions in international organizations has become stronger. Thompson (2006) describes why powerful states may use major international organizations to pursue their interests. Oatley and Yackee (2004) conclude that the US may use its influence in the IMF for its own purposes. As for the United Nations, Dreher et al. (2009a) and Dreher et al. (2009b) show that non-permanent UNSC members tend to receive favorable treatment from the IMF and the World Bank. Kuziemko and Werker (2006) find that UN aid, but also US aid, increases when a country rotates onto the UNSC. Our paper adds to the literature on a potential bias in UNSC decisions by showing that interventions tend to occur in conflicts that are geographically closer to its three permanent Western members.

As for the existing literature on UN intervention determinants, Jakobsen (1996) discusses potential drivers of five particular UN peace enforcement operations. Voeten (2001) provides a game-theoretic approach to explain voting in the UNSC. Stojek and Tir (2011) argue that the economic interests of the five permanent UNSC members play an important role in UN intervention decisions. Some literature has examined third-party interventions in general terms, finding the behavior of other potential intervening countries to matter (Aydin 2010) along with ideological linkage and geographical proximity (Mullenbach 2005). Perkins and Neumayer (2008) find that a country’s decision to participate in peacekeeping operations can be influenced by its geographical proximity to the conflict nation. However, while geographical proximity may present a justifiable reason for intervention decisions by

¹ See BBC (2004) and Times (1994).

single countries (or countries participating in an intervention authorized by regional organizations), in theory it should not enter UNSC decisions.

Geographical proximity has been discussed as a determinant for foreign military intervention, both in general (Pearson 1974; Perkins and Neumayer 2008) and in the context of the US (Mullenbach and Matthews 2008). Neack (1995) has hinted that states might participate in UN interventions predominantly for selfish reasons. In fact, selfish reasons for a UNSC member to push for a UN intervention close to home are easy to find. In addition to political and economic ties, the conflict may spread further (like the current conflict in Syria spilling over to Lebanon or the conflict in Kosovo threatening to spark violence in Albania), major immigration waves could result from nearby conflicts (e.g., North African immigration waves to Europe during the Arab Spring, especially to Italy; Syrian refugees fleeing to Europe), or it may simply be more expensive to intervene in conflicts located further away.² Our findings indicate that neither political nor economic reasons can explain the importance of distance, but we do find some evidence that practical reasons could drive our results. It may simply be that the chances of success are higher and the costs of intervention are lower in conflicts located closer to home.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a theoretical intuition on the role of geographical distance in conflicts and interventions. Sections 3 and 4 describe the sample and present potential determinants of UN intervention decisions. Section 5 introduces our empirical methodology and Section 6 presents our findings. Section 7 discusses and tests alternative explanations and Section 9 concludes the paper.

2 A theoretical background

Why would the geographical distance between the conflict country and the UNSC's deciding powers matter? In terms of geographical characteristics of conflicts, there exists a sizeable literature discussing spatial attributes. O'Loughlin (1986) argues that throughout history conflicts have clustered geographically, and so have variables that may explain conflict onset. In this context, "spatial factors are as important as military expenditures and are more important than the commonly used political and economic predictors in explaining war behavior" (O'Loughlin 1986, p. 78). Starr (2005) suggests similar arguments and Diehl (1991) provides a useful review of this literature.

In a more general context, Tobler (1970) states that "Everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related to each other" – a statement which since became known as the first law of geography. Thus, individuals and, on a larger scale, nations are not independent, as relationships among them can generate spillovers and produce externalities spreading across borders.

²For a brief summary of the recent immigration waves from Syria to Italy, consider (BBC2 2014).

2.1 Geography and conflicts

Applied to conflicts, space seems to matter and it is possible for conflicts to affect the economic stability of neighboring nations (Murdoch and Sandler 2002; De Groot 2010; Ahrens 2013). Beyond that, the conflict may spill over to neighboring countries (Carmignani and Kler 2013). A direct consequence of both the first law of geography and these empirical observations then produces a simple theoretical framework: nation i may incur spatial spillovers (in the form of negative externalities), S_{ij} , from a conflict in nation j , depending on their geographical distance from each other (d_{ij}). In general, we can write the probability of spillovers as a function of distance then as

$$P[S_{ij}|X_j] = F(d_{ij}), \quad (1)$$

where X_j represents other non-spatial attributes related to the conflict, such as the intensity or form of the conflict. Consequently, we would expect $\frac{\partial F}{\partial d_{ij}} < 0$. Several recent papers focus on the mechanisms of contagion, such as alliances (Benson et al. 2013), learning effects (Danneman and Ritter 2014), refugee flows (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006), and unobserved country specific channels (Murdoch and Sandler 2002).

2.2 Geography and UNSC interventions

Considering the response to conflicts, security dynamics themselves may cluster geographically. Buzan and Waever (2003, p. 4) propose a Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, specifying that “since most threats travel more easily over short distances than long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes.” However, great powers may influence and penetrate them without actually being members – an argument potentially applicable to the UNSC. According to Joyce and Braithwaite (2013), proximity can play an important role in third party intervention. Proximity influences the decision of a state to intervene in an interstate dispute because costs decrease with distance at the same time that salience increases. In addition, a conflict happening close by may pose a potential threat to the third party’s security. Thus, states are more likely to intervene in proximate conflicts.

Turning to the UNSC, the council is led by five permanent members: China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US. Effectively, these nations handle the responsibility of deciding whether or not this institution will intervene in a given conflict. Even though the non-permanent members carry voting power and influence, the literature as well as the associated press has numerous times suggested the outstanding power of the permanent members (e.g., see O’Neill 1996). One visible example of this power can be found in the exclusive veto power. As a consequence, it is possible for these leading powers to not necessarily act in the interest of the entire United Nations community, but rather pursue their own interests. Thus, the probability of a

UNSC intervention ($Interv_{UNSC}$) may be affected by the distance (d_{ij}) between the nation in conflict, j , and the permanent member state i . Formally, this leads to

$$P[Interv_{UNSC}|X_j, Z] = \sum_{i=1}^5 \omega_i G(d_{ij}), \quad (2)$$

where Z stands for other exogenous factors that are not related to the conflict, such as international political characteristics or domestic factors of the UNSC powers. Further, ω_i relates to the internal distribution of power between the five permanent UNSC members (with $\sum_{i=1}^5 \omega_i = 1$). Keeping all other factors constant, the probability of intervention is then suggested to decrease as the distance between the conflict nation and the permanent members increases, i.e., $\frac{\partial G}{\partial d_{ij}} < 0$.

Finally, Lake (2009) finds that the US have developed security hierarchies in North and South America, as well as in Western Europe (after the Second World War) and East Asia. In general, ω_i could differ across the five permanent members and the distance from some permanent UNSC members, such as the US, may play a bigger role than the distance to others.

2.3 Potential mechanisms

If geographic distance may indeed play a role in UNSC decisions, we then need to ask ourselves about the exact mechanism. With the above discussion in mind, we distinguish between four distinct reasons, although this list does not claim to be complete:

1. UNSC members may be worried about direct spillovers, i.e., immigrant waves or economic and political shocks, either towards the own country or to close economic and political allies.
2. It may simply be more expensive to intervene in conflicts further away.
3. The chances of success may be lower in conflicts further away, as it is more difficult to assess the details of the conflict and to provide military resources.
4. The degree of solidarity and care for people closer to home may be bigger.

The first theory may be the most intuitive explanation, upon which previous works relating geography and conflicts are constructed. However, the remaining three options should not easily be discarded and it is of course possible that a combination of reasons determines the importance of geography here. Consider arguments number 2 and 3: sizeable military personnel and machinery may be costly to transport over long distances. In a domestic context, Buhaug et al. (2009) suggest that the “distances an army must travel to project power...affect[s] how a civil war is fought and who will prevail.” In this context, it is interesting to consider military interventions, as well as non-military interventions requiring less resources, such as imposing an embargo or sending an observer mission. Unfortunately, distinguishing between these potential explanations is difficult, although Sections 7 and 8 provide some indication. With this theoretical background in mind, we now turn to describing the conflicts and the corresponding UNSC interventions.

3 Conflicts and interventions

Between 1950 and 2012, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) notes the beginning of 199 armed conflicts worldwide. We use the conflict identifier in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, available at <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets>, going back to Gleditsch et al. (2002). The UCDP defines conflict as

a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths.

These conflicts are categorized as interstate, internal, and internationalized internal armed conflicts. Interstate conflicts are defined as taking place between two governments, whereas the UCDP defines an internal conflict as being between

a government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) without intervention from other states.

Finally, an

[i]nternationalized internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) with intervention from other states (secondary parties) on one or both sides.

Our analysis excludes extrasystemic armed conflicts between a state and a non-state group outside of its own territory, as the UN has not intervened militarily in any of these.

We choose conflicts that began after 1949, because that is when broad comparable data on the country level becomes available. We capture the characteristics of a country at the beginning of the conflict, which will be explained in Section 4. Our main sample consists of 174 conflicts for which information on all main variables is available. For details, Table A.1 in the online appendix on the journal's website lists all conflicts and interventions in addition to marking the 25 conflicts for which we do not have data. Most conflicts for which data is unavailable occurred in Asia (17). However, we find no statistically significant difference in terms of intervention probability between the sample conflicts and the remaining 25 conflicts. Notice that there are several double entries, meaning that some countries incurred various conflicts within a year. However, we were able to match each intervention with the targeted conflict.

In terms of UN interventions, we distinguish between four types of action:³

1. Military intervention for peacebuilding,
2. Military intervention for peacekeeping,
3. Sanctions or embargoes, and
4. Demands to cease hostilities or to establish an observer mission.

³What the UN means by "intervention" is not entirely clear, as there exists no single definition. Higgins (1995) provides a deeper discussion.

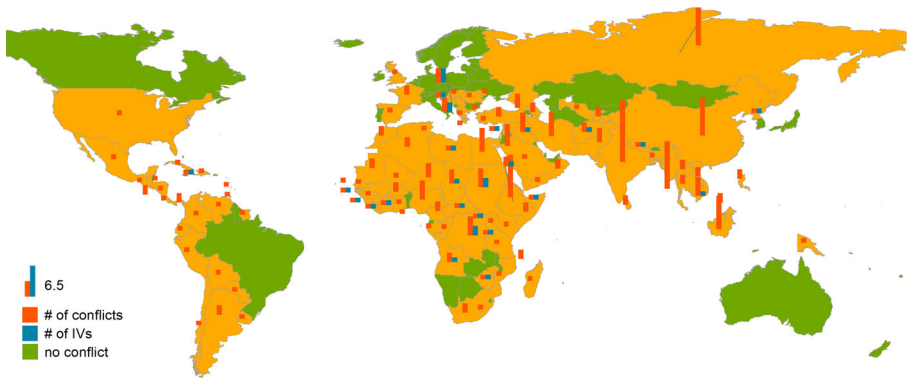


Fig. 1 Conflicts and interventions

Throughout the majority of the paper, we define military actions – cases 1 and 2 – as interventions, following previous literature. The remaining two types of action are usually associated with substantially lower commitment levels, in economic, military, and political terms. Therefore, we code these as non-interventions for now. In our final sample of 174 conflicts, the UN conducted military interventions in 40.

Figure 1 shows conflicts and UN interventions, and we notice that the overwhelming majority of conflicts in the second part of the 20th century occurred on the African and Asian continents. The raw intervention probability in Africa stands at a remarkable 31.6 percent rate, whereas Asian conflicts show substantially smaller chances of UN intervention at 12.5 percent. Previously, Bariagaber (2008) documented that there have been more UN interventions in Africa since the late 90s. The formation of the post-Soviet states and the dissolution of Yugoslavia marked a series of European conflicts in the early 1990s.

Figure 2 then displays the relationship between the conflict intensity and the number of UN interventions, showing whether the country had at least one conflict year with over 999 battle-related deaths. This cutoff is provided in the UCDP database to

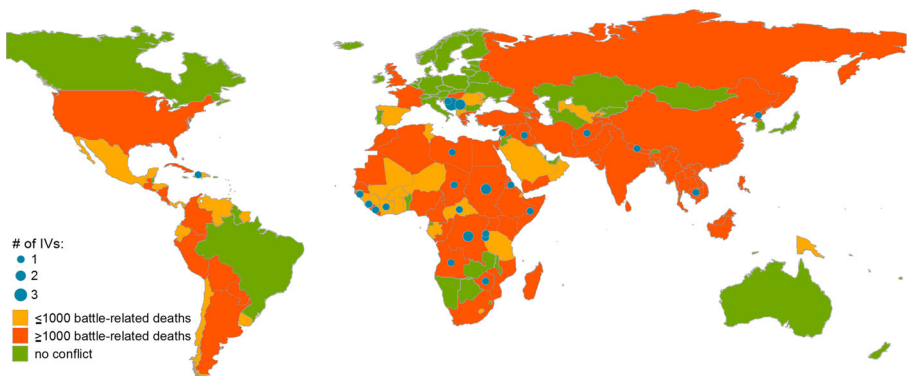


Fig. 2 Interventions and intensity

identify particularly violent conflicts. Especially Central and East African, but also Asian and South American conflicts, have been marked by at least one such violent year. In contrast to this basic comparison is the frequency of interventions, however, which appears to suggest a focus on African, Eastern European, and a few Middle Eastern and Asian countries. One should keep in mind, though, that these maps do not account for other important factors beyond intensity.

4 Potential determinants of UN intervention

Our main estimations consider four general categories of potential factors associated with UNSC interventions: the conflict characteristics, but also social and historical, macroeconomic, and geographical factors. Including our extensions, the analysis incorporates data from 8 different sources to analyze the factors associated with UN intervention decisions: the UN, the UCDP, the PWT version 7.1, Polity IV, the Affinity of Nations index, the Correlates of War, and the Quality of Governance data sets. The following sections describe the variables of the main analysis in turn, whereas details on all variables used in our analysis with their respective sources are listed in Table A.2 of the online appendix.

Beyond the variables used in our main analysis, Section 7 will consider additional factors that may well be associated with UN intervention decisions. Of course, the line between characteristics used in the main analysis and variables employed in the extensions is somewhat arbitrary. Our main criteria for the distinction is given by what we consider to be potentially primary factors influencing intervention decisions versus potentially secondary characteristics. In addition, some variables that may appear of primary importance are moved to Section 7 for data availability reasons.

4.1 Conflict characteristics

All conflict-related variables are taken directly from the UCDP data set. First, we include a binary variable for the intensity of the conflict, coded as one if the conflict experienced at least one year with over 999 battle-related deaths.⁴ We would assume that the intervention probability would increase with a greater number of victims (see Gilligan et al. 2003). Ideally, we would like to include a more precise and continuous measurement of conflict intensity, but information on the exact number of conflict victims is scarce and usually comes with great uncertainty and large lower and upper boundaries. Thus, we would lose a substantial number of observations if we were to include a more defined measurement for conflict intensity, but not necessarily gain accuracy. In addition, we control for the type of conflict, distinguishing between interstate, internal, and internationalized armed conflicts. Jakobsen (1996) discusses both the intensity and the conflict type as potential determinants of UN peace enforcement missions.

⁴There are, of course, different ways to measure the intensity, such as the fraction of conflict years with over 999 battle-related deaths, etc. Our results are robust to using different measurements.

4.2 Social and historical factors

Social components of countries, and especially their historical ties to traditional Western nations, could be important factors in UN intervention decisions. We control for population size, which has the potential for two primary intuitions (see Melander 2009, for instance). First, a bigger society means a bigger potential human loss in a conflict. Second, the more people live in a country, the more potential soldiers there are, which may lower the chances of success and raise the costs of an intervention. The first argument promotes a positive relationship between population size and the probability of intervention, whereas the second argument suggests a negative effect (see also Alesina and Spolaore 2005). To facilitate comparability and contain the influence of outliers, we apply the natural logarithm to population size throughout all estimations.

In terms of historical relationships to the colonial powers, we also add information about the former colony status of the conflict nation. Specifically, we incorporate dummies for French, Portuguese, and Dutch origin (Gilligan and et al. 2003). Including binary variables for British or Spanish colonies never returned significance, and their inclusion does not affect our conclusions.

4.3 Macroeconomic factors

The economic environment of a conflict nation may play an important role in the UN's decision to intervene militarily. First, we include GDP per capita at the inception of the conflict to capture the basic development level of the country. The humanitarian aspect of including GDP per capita states that the UN may be more inclined to protect those people who are unable to protect themselves, which many times includes the poor. In this context, we also refer to the "R2P" (Responsibility to Protect) initiative, formalized by the UN in 2005. Further, the opportunity cost of joining an army could be smaller when general income possibilities in a country are low. Thus, potential fatalities could be higher in poorer nations, everything else equal. Finally, there may be a practical argument for considering income levels in UNSC decisions: an intervention could be both cheaper and more likely to succeed in poorer nations because military and technical resources are likely to be less developed.

Second, we consider a country's openness to international trade, measured as the share of exports plus imports in GDP. Theoretically, conflict countries with stronger international economic ties could be prioritized by the UN, as other countries may be economically affected by the conflict (also consider Martin et al. 2012, in this context). Thus, there could be a stronger international interest in intervening in more open countries. Section 4 also considers bilateral trade flows between the five permanent members and the conflict nation.

For both GDP per capita and trade openness, we use values at the starting year of the conflict to allow for better data availability, as opposed to one year prior to the conflict. Further, we apply the natural logarithm to both variables, as is common in the macroeconomics literature. All findings are robust to using lagged values or to refraining from applying logarithms. The data for both income levels and trade openness come from the PWT 7.1 and is supplemented by the World Bank, in case

the PWT 7.1 does not contain information (see Tables A.1 and A.2 in the online appendix for details).

4.4 Geographical factors

In terms of geography, we include the geographical distance of the conflicts to the five permanent UNSC members: China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US. These nations have been shown to possess overwhelming power in UNSC decisions, both directly through their veto power and indirectly through their dominant political and economic roles, e.g., by O'Neill (1996).

All distances are calculated as the minimum distance between the border of the conflict country and the reference nation in 1,000 kilometers. Therefore, countries that share a common border receive a value of zero, for instance in the case of Afghanistan and its distance to China. It is important to mention that we use the distance to the former Soviet Union before 1991 and then Russia thereafter. However, using the distance to today's Russia for the entire time period does not change our conclusions. Similarly, we choose the distance to Taiwan for the distance to China until 1971, as the official government of China was located on the island until then. Here also, our conclusions do not change if we use the distance to Mainland China throughout the entire time period.

We then condense these five distance measures to two variables: *Distance to West*, capturing the distance to the closest Western UNSC permanent member (France, the UK, or the US), and *Distance to East*, calculated as the minimum distance to the Eastern permanent members of the UNSC (China or Russia). However, all derived results are robust to using the individual distance variables.

Finally, we follow Gilligan and et al. (2003) by considering continental fixed effects for Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Using other geographical aspects, such as binary variables for landlocked and island countries, never reach conventional significance levels; including them does not change our conclusions and these results are available upon request.

5 Methodology

Throughout the paper, we apply a logit regression framework to estimate the probability p_i of a UN military intervention in conflict i by

$$\text{logit}(p)_i = \alpha_0 + \mathbf{X}_i\alpha_1 + \mathbf{Z}_i\alpha_2 + \mathbf{GEO}_i\alpha_3 + \delta_i. \quad (3)$$

\mathbf{X}_i incorporates the intensity (*Intense*) and form (*Interstate* and *Internal*, with *internationalized* as the reference) of the conflict. \mathbf{Z}_i contains population size (*Population*), GDP per capita (*GDP/capita*), and openness to trade (*Trade openness*) in the starting year of the conflict, in addition to colony fixed effects. All derived results are robust to using values one year before the conflict beginning for the time-varying components of \mathbf{Z}_i . \mathbf{GEO}_i contains one of the five distances to the permanent UNSC members or *Distance to West* and *Distance to East*, in addition to continental fixed effects. Finally, δ_i captures the usual error term.

Section 7 considers alternative explanations for the main results, adding to Eq. 3 accordingly. All derived results are robust to using a probit framework.

6 The probability of intervention

Table 1 shows the main results from estimating Eq. 3, where we include the distance to each of the five permanent UNSC members in turn. The final column includes distances to the closest Western (*Distance to West*) and Eastern (*Distance to East*) permanent UNSC members. Table 1 and all following Tables display marginal effects, log-likelihood values, and Chi-squared values. Further, Figs. 3, 4, 5 and 6 visualize the derived results in terms of predicted probabilities.

6.1 Results from logit estimations

Starting with the conflict characteristics, we find that having at least one year with over 999 battle-related deaths raises the probability of intervention by approximately 14 to 16 percent (*Intense*). This finding remains consistent throughout the paper. The form of conflict, however, appears to matter less, although internationalized conflicts (the omitted category) are weakly suggested to receive priority.

Further, interventions are more likely in smaller and poorer nations. Regarding a quantitative interpretation, our most complete specification displayed in column (6) proposes an 8.2 percentage point decrease in the intervention probability once GDP per capita is doubled. Openness to trade, however, does not appear to matter, as the suggested coefficient is negative, but not significant. Considering continental effects, we find no evidence for a preference across continents and this result remains consistent throughout all our estimations.

Moving to geographical distances, proximity to the West appears to play a significant role. Distances to France, the UK, and the US are statistically significant predictors of intervention. The negative sign suggests that the probability of a military intervention by the UN decreases with distance. The coefficients for the distances to China or Russia, however, are never close to conventional significance levels. Column (6) then includes the minimum distances to the Western and Eastern powers. Confirming the importance of the individual distance measurements, for every 1,000 kilometers of distance from the West the chance of a UN intervention decreases by 4 percent. This result means that the probability of intervention is suggested to be 42 – 43 percentage points lower in a country like Malaysia or Indonesia as opposed to any country bordering France, the UK, or the US, such as Mexico or Spain. The regressions displayed in Table 1 also show that the distance finding cannot be explained by continental preferences, as Gilligan and et al. (2003) previously suggested a regional bias of UN interventions against Asian conflicts. In additional estimations, we also tested whether the distance finding varies along the lines of conflict intensity, but we do not find any evidence in that direction. These results are available upon request.

Table 1 Logit regression results, displaying marginal effects

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable: <i>Interv</i>						
<i>Distance to China</i>	0.002 (0.012)					
<i>Distance to France</i>		-0.035* (0.019)				
<i>Distance to Russia</i>			-0.028 (0.021)			
<i>Distance to UK</i>				-0.035* (0.018)		
<i>Distance to US</i>					-0.040*** (0.015)	
<i>Distance to West</i>						-0.040** (0.019)
<i>Distance to East</i>						-0.007 (0.027)
<i>Intense</i>	0.163*** (0.058)	0.150** (0.059)	0.157*** (0.056)	0.150** (0.059)	0.157*** (0.056)	0.141** (0.058)
<i>Internal</i>	-0.090 (0.072)	-0.089 (0.071)	-0.084 (0.071)	-0.090 (0.071)	-0.097 (0.072)	-0.087 (0.072)
<i>Interstate</i>	-0.057 (0.086)	-0.080 (0.085)	-0.076 (0.084)	-0.080 (0.085)	-0.084 (0.088)	-0.091 (0.084)
<i>Population</i>	-0.043** (0.022)	-0.049** (0.023)	-0.051** (0.023)	-0.050** (0.023)	-0.059** (0.026)	-0.054** (0.023)
<i>GDP/capita</i>	-0.057 (0.044)	-0.083** (0.042)	-0.057 (0.039)	-0.084** (0.042)	-0.085** (0.041)	-0.085** (0.041)
<i>Trade openness</i>	-0.023 (0.039)	-0.037 (0.041)	-0.031 (0.039)	-0.037 (0.041)	-0.043 (0.040)	-0.046 (0.041)
<i>Africa</i>	0.041 (0.151)	-0.151 (0.184)	-0.118 (0.183)	-0.122 (0.174)	0.247* (0.149)	0.009 (0.204)
<i>Asia</i>	-0.081 (0.190)	-0.227 (0.165)	-0.315 (0.213)	-0.212 (0.160)	0.155 (0.159)	-0.080 (0.280)
<i>Europe</i>	0.043 (0.151)	-0.208 (0.187)	-0.208 (0.215)	-0.194 (0.179)	0.190 (0.122)	-0.077 (0.255)
Colony fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>N</i>	174	174	174	174	174	174
Log lik.	-72.14	-70.18	-71.29	-70.14	-69.45	-69.11
Chi-squared	37.25	41.63	40.61	41.71	41.41	44.11

Dependent variable is probability of military intervention by the UN (*Interv*)

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

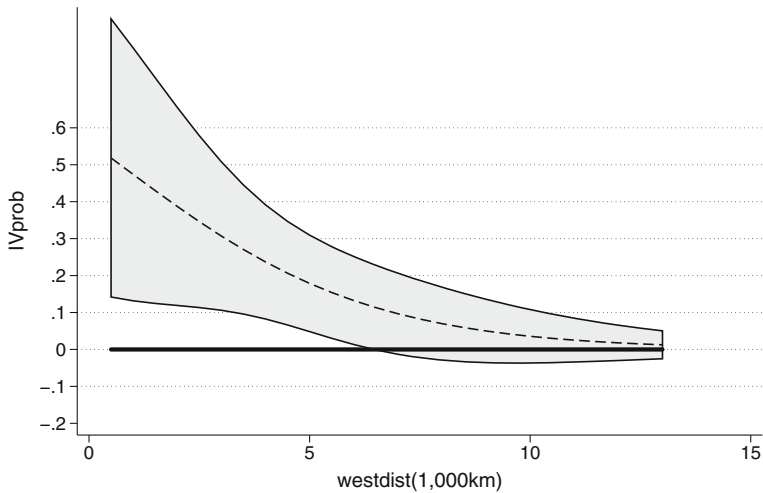


Fig. 3 Predicted probability of UN military intervention in intense internal conflict, at means

6.2 Predicting UN interventions

Figures 3–5 provide estimated probabilities relative to *Distance to West* for different conflict scenarios, where other explanatory variables are assumed at their sample means. These figures also display the two-sided 95 percent confidence interval. In the case of an intense internal conflict, the estimated probability of intervention reaches over 50 percent for any country adjoining France, the UK, or the US. For a country with over 10,000 kilometers of distance however, like Malaysia or Indonesia, the probability approaches zero. Results for interstate and internationalized conflicts are similar.

In terms of predicting the probability of interventions, we now use data from the PWT 7.1 for *all* available countries for the year 2010 and not only our sample countries. Assuming a hypothetical intense (over 999 battle-related deaths) internal conflict, we use our primary results from Table 1, column (6), to calculate the predicted probability of a military intervention by the UN.⁵ Note that African countries generally appear to enjoy higher odds of intervention than Asian or even European countries. Angola, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Somalia stand out with probabilities of over 85 percent. In these cases, poverty and population size are the driving factors. Similarly, the small nations in the Northeast of South America (Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana) receive a high likelihood. Especially the Eastern European nations from Estonia in the North to Greece in the South display stronger probabilities – a result that is partially driven by their geographical proximity to Western Europe. Although this exercise is speculative, these results shed some interesting light on the predicted patterns of intervention.

⁵The predicted probabilities are calculated as $prob(Interv) = \frac{1}{1+e^{-\logit(p)_i}}$ following Greene (2003).

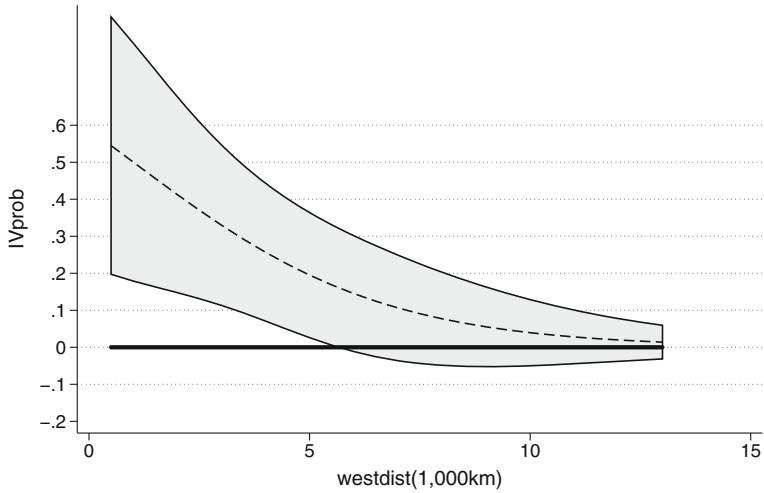


Fig. 4 Predicted probability of UN military intervention in intense interstate conflict, at means

7 Extensions

This importance of *Distance to West* in the probability for a military intervention by the UN is startling. However, it may well be possible that these findings are spurious and the result of an omitted variable bias. In this case, the lack of a clear theoretical framework that could provide guidance for the true model leaves room for additional hypotheses. One could think of various explanations, and the following list is surely not complete, as the real reasons for UNSC resolution decisions are difficult

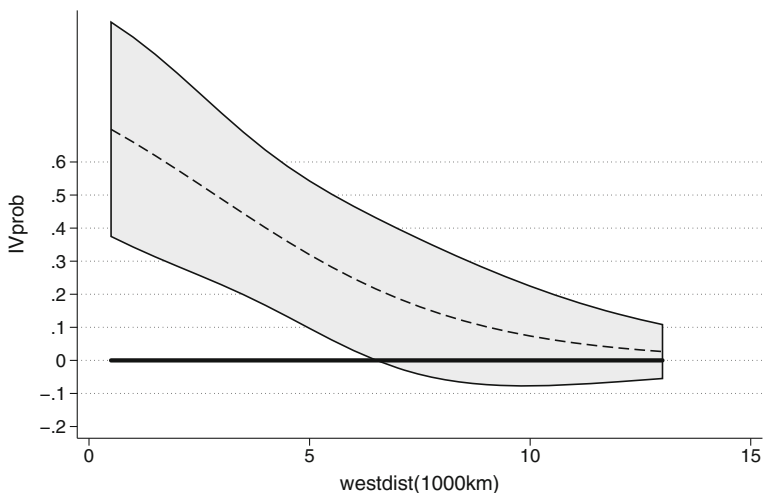


Fig. 5 Predicted probability of UN military intervention in intense internationalized conflict, at means

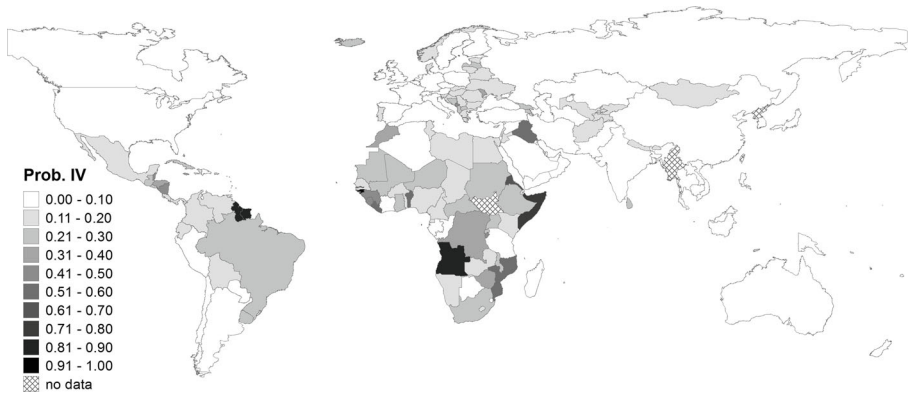


Fig. 6 Predicted Probability of Intervention (using Table 1, Column 6)

to retract. This difficulty is true for intervention cases, but even more so for non-intervention decisions. The real motivations behind political decisions, especially on the global stage, are sometimes only identified decades later, if even. Overall, we distinguish between three broad sets of additional variables to test the robustness of these distance findings: political, economic, and practical considerations. However, some theories, such as the importance of foreign aid for instance, may fit in several categories. Naturally, we are not only interested in explaining the distance finding, but also in the individual effect of these variables on intervention decisions. Although we proceed with using *Distance to West* and *Distance to East*, all conclusions are closely replicable using the individual distances to the five permanent member states.

7.1 Political factors

Tables 2 and 3 show a variety of extensions, taking into account the various political circumstances after 1949 and the UN voting habits of the conflict nations in relation to the five permanent UNSC members.

First, the period from 1950 to 2012 has been marked by major political disputes between the five permanent UNSC members as well as within each of these nations. We focus on three major aspects of these relationships that existed throughout this time period. First, the Cold War period has clearly shaped global political decisions, especially between the Soviet Union and the US. For instance, Gilligan and et al. (2003) and Wallenstein (2011) suggest that UN interventions were generally less likely during the Cold War period. Second, some conflicts stand out in relation to the five permanent members, such as the Yugoslav wars at the heart of Europe, the conflicts associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union, or conflicts in the member states themselves. We want to make sure that these special conflicts do not drive our results. Third, following Andersson (2000) and Melander (2009), we include the political regime form of the conflict country using the Polity IV variable, which ranges from -10 (total autocracy) to $+10$ (total democracy). Table 2 considers each

Table 2 Political explanations

	(1)	Only Cold War Period (2)	Excl. Europe (3)	Excl. Conflicts in 5 PMs (4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable: <i>Interv</i>						
<i>Distance to West</i>	-0.036* (0.020)	-0.056** (0.026)	-0.043** (0.021)	-0.049** (0.022)	-0.041** (0.019)	-0.050*** (0.019)
<i>Distance to East</i>	-0.010 (0.025)	0.000 (0.037)	-0.002 (0.030)	0.003 (0.031)	-0.007 (0.025)	0.003 (0.029)
<i>Cold War</i>	-0.111* (0.065)					
<i>Own Interv</i>					0.207** (0.090)	
<i>Polity IV</i>						-0.010* (0.006)
<i>Intense</i>	0.165*** (0.059)	0.161** (0.067)	0.128** (0.058)	0.153** (0.062)	0.163*** (0.059)	0.092* (0.055)
<i>Internal</i>	-0.071 (0.070)	-0.056 (0.080)	-0.073 (0.073)	-0.093 (0.078)	-0.023 (0.083)	-0.107 (0.068)
<i>Interstate</i>	-0.064 (0.082)	-0.039 (0.096)	-0.051 (0.092)	-0.062 (0.097)	-0.029 (0.090)	-0.076 (0.081)
<i>Population</i>	-0.056** (0.022)	-0.059** (0.025)	-0.057** (0.023)	-0.040 (0.025)	-0.048** (0.023)	-0.077*** (0.023)
<i>GDP/capita</i>	-0.079* (0.041)	-0.105** (0.053)	-0.099** (0.047)	-0.084* (0.047)	-0.091** (0.041)	-0.089** (0.040)
<i>Trade openness</i>	-0.065 (0.043)	-0.050 (0.048)	-0.062 (0.044)	-0.069 (0.045)	-0.038 (0.041)	-0.055 (0.042)
<i>Africa</i>	-0.011 (0.193)	0.026 (0.256)	0.031 (0.223)	0.075 (0.233)	0.006 (0.191)	-0.015 (0.216)
<i>Asia</i>	-0.130 (0.257)	0.022 (0.377)	-0.030 (0.307)	0.020 (0.326)	-0.110 (0.260)	-0.008 (0.308)
<i>Europe</i>	-0.129 (0.235)	-0.110 (0.353)		0.041 (0.303)	-0.073 (0.233)	-0.099 (0.271)
Colony fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>N</i>	174	132	154	160	174	164
Log lik.	-67.94	-48.12	-59.14	-67.34	-67.24	-57.95
Chi-squared	43.51	38.79	40.57	40.11	42.73	42.50

Logit regression results, displaying marginal effects. Dependent variable is probability of military intervention by the UN (*Interv*)

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 Political explanations continued, considering the affinity to UN voting

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable: <i>Interv</i>						
<i>Distance to West</i>	-0.051** (0.026)	-0.059*** (0.021)	-0.032* (0.019)	-0.059*** (0.021)	-0.057*** (0.020)	-0.059*** (0.023)
<i>Distance to East</i>	0.046 (0.032)	0.026 (0.032)	0.027 (0.037)	0.027 (0.032)	0.025 (0.032)	0.040 (0.032)
<i>Affchina</i>	-0.150 (0.419)					
<i>Afffrance</i>		-0.048 (0.322)				
<i>Affrussia</i>			0.273 (0.213)			
<i>Affuk</i>				-0.067 (0.305)		
<i>Affus</i>					-0.143 (0.188)	
<i>Affwest</i>						0.013 (0.363)
<i>Affeast</i>						-0.079 (0.204)
Control variables ^a	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Colony fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>N</i>	112	150	131	150	149	140
Log lik.	-34.93	-57.89	-43.45	-57.88	-57.48	-51.42
Chi-squared	31.47	38.17	233.11	37.88	36.88	39.74

Logit regression results, displaying marginal effects. Dependent variable is probability of military intervention by the UN (*Interv*)

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

^aIncorporates *Intense*, *Internal*, *Interstate*, *Population*, *GDP/capita*, *Trade openness*, *Africa*, *Asia*, and *Europe*

of these events, using column (6) of Table 1 as the reference point and the most complete specification.

In column (1), we include a dummy variable for conflicts that started during the Cold War period, whereas in column (2) we re-estimate our main regression excluding conflicts that began after the Cold War ended. Columns (3) and (4) repeat these exercises excluding conflicts on the European continent and within the five permanent members. Column (5) includes a dummy for conflicts in which any of the five

permanent members participated individually.⁶ Finally, column (6) controls for the democracy level of the conflict country in the beginning year of the conflict.⁷

We find several noteworthy results from these extensions. First, the distance to the Western powers remains important. In fact, significance levels and magnitudes mostly even increase compared to our baseline estimation from Table 1. Distance to the East, however, remains a non-factor. The remaining coefficients confirm the baseline findings throughout all extensions. Second, UN interventions appear to be more likely in non-democratic countries, confirming findings by Stojek and Tir (2011), and nations in which one of the five permanent members also intervened independently of the UN.

Another measurement of the political relationship between conflict countries and the five permanent members comes from the “Affinity of Nations” data set (Voeten and Merdzanovic 2013). Following Fortna (2008) and Stojek and Tir (2011), this data set allows us to include a voting similarity index between the conflict nation and each of the five permanent UNSC members in UN resolutions, ranging from 0 to 1 (variable *agree3un* in data set). Table 3 shows the results when including each of these scores in turn. Column (6) then includes the maximum affinity score with the Western (*Affwest*) and the Eastern permanent UNSC members (*Affeast*). The main takeaway from these regressions is that none of the affinity scores has an impact on the intervention probability. With respect to the distance findings, *Distance to West* remains significant throughout Table 3. Only in column (3) does the magnitude drop to 0.32, potentially due to the loss of 43 observations when including the affinity score to the Russian UN voting behavior. The coefficients of the remaining control variables are not displayed from here on, as their significance levels and magnitudes confirm the main results from Table 1.

In summary, the political explanations presented in this section are unlikely to drive the importance of the geographical distance to the West in UN military intervention decisions. However, some political aspects do have an independent relationship with UNSC decisions, such as the democracy level of the regime in general or the Cold War period in particular. In additional estimations, we also incorporated the possibility of several other political attributes, such as membership in the Warsaw Pact, being a nuclear power, and membership in regional associations (e.g., the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, SAARC). None of these appear to be important in their own right or to affect the importance of *Distance to West*.

7.2 Economic factors: Bilateral trade, foreign aid, and distance to oil suppliers

Turning to economic characteristics, we now consider bilateral trade relationships, foreign aid flows, and the geographical distance of the conflict nation to major oil supplying countries. Here again, we are both interested in the individual connection

⁶We use the list of participating nations in the UCDP data set to identify conflicts in which the permanent members officially participated.

⁷As with other time-varying variables, using values from one year prior to the conflict does not affect our conclusions.

between these variables and the probability of UN interventions, but also whether their inclusion is able to explain the importance of *Distance to West*.

First, we take a closer look at international trade aspects. Although our primary analysis incorporates overall trade openness, the specific trade relationship with the five permanent members could be of particular importance, leading us to include bilateral trade flows.⁸ Previously, Stojek and Tir (2011) suggested that the economic interests of major powers play a decisive role in UN peacekeeping decisions, although Perkins and Neumayer (2008) find no importance for the participation of individual nations in international peacekeeping operations. From an individual country's perspective, it would be understandable if the inclination to promote an intervention was stronger for countries with which it maintains strong trade relationships. Similarly, foreign aid flows to developing nations (which the majority of the conflict countries are) provide a measure of increased interest and concern from the West about the specific country.

Table 4 considers these variables in turn. Specifically, we include the natural logarithm of exports to (and imports from) the US in the beginning year of the conflict, adjusted by the US price level at the time. We then add the total exports to (and imports from) France, the UK, and the US in columns (3) and (4). Interestingly, we find weak evidence of stronger trade relationships *decreasing* the odds of intervention – a somewhat counterintuitive result. Moving to the final two columns of Table 4, we include the natural logarithm of net foreign aid received by the conflict country at the beginning of the conflict, first in overall terms and then from the US only. Similar to bilateral trade flows, we see no change in our main results, suggesting that the distance findings are not driven by foreign aid flows. In this case however, it is important to note that we are losing up to 56 observations due to the unavailability of data. The findings presented in Table 4 are virtually identical if we use trade (foreign aid) relative to population or GDP.

Finally, we also consider the extraordinary importance of oil in the world economy, especially for the Western powers. As numerous conflicts in the second half of the twentieth century have been fought in or close to major oil supplying nations, one could suspect these concerns may enter UNSC discussions, at least behind closed doors. Thus, we also test whether the distance of the conflict to major oil suppliers plays a role in determining the intervention probability.⁹ Table 5 shows these results, adding distances to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, and Venezuela to our baseline regression. Interestingly, none of these distances matters and *Distance to West* remains a powerful predictor of UN interventions. Finally, column (6) of Table 5 introduces the distance to Israel, given the country's importance in world politics ever since its foundation. However, we find no importance for the distance to Israel either.

In summary, it appears unlikely that economic factors are driving the importance of the distance to the Western powers. Neither bilateral trade flows nor foreign aid nor distances to major oil suppliers are able to account for the importance of the

⁸Bilateral trade data comes from the Correlates of War data set (see Barbieri et al. 2009, and Barbieri and Keshk 2012).

⁹Table A.3 in the online appendix provides correlations between all distance measures used.

Table 4 Economic explanations

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable: <i>Interv</i>						
<i>Distance to West</i>	-0.038** (0.019)	-0.039** (0.020)	-0.044** (0.020)	-0.045** (0.022)	-0.037* (0.019)	-0.043** (0.021)
<i>Distance to East</i>	0.006 (0.015)	0.009 (0.016)	0.014 (0.016)	0.014 (0.015)	-0.003 (0.013)	0.018 (0.028)
<i>Exports to US</i>	0.011 (0.020)					
<i>Imports from US</i>		0.005 (0.025)				
<i>Exports to West</i>			-0.036 (0.026)			
<i>Imports from West</i>				-0.056 (0.036)		
<i>Total Aid</i>					0.036* (0.020)	
<i>Aid from US</i>						-0.026 (0.024)
Control variables ^a	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Colony fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>N</i>	158	158	154	154	145	118
Log lik.	-57.45	-57.59	-56.18	-55.99	-54.40	-46.22
Chi-squared	43.71	42.17	39.12	42.33	38.73	32.68

Logit regression results, displaying marginal effects. Dependent variable is probability of military intervention by the UN (*Interv*)

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

^aIncorporates *Intense*, *Internal*, *Interstate*, *Population*, *GDP/capita*, *Trade openness*, *Africa*, and *Asia*. *Europe* omitted because it predicts failure perfectly

geographical distance to the West in UN intervention decisions. As a last category of possible explanations, we now turn to practical aspects.

7.3 Practical considerations: Chances of success, costs, and feasibility

Beyond political and economic explanations for the distance finding, we further consider practical reasons as a third option. For instance, it could simply be less expensive and more convenient to intervene in a conflict nearby as opposed to a conflict located thousands of kilometers away, as suggested in Section 2. Unfortunately, it proves to be difficult to test this alternative hypothesis directly: even though we may

Table 5 Economic explanations continued, considering the geographical distance to major oil suppliers

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable: <i>Interv</i>						
<i>Distance to West</i>	-0.044*** (0.017)	-0.045*** (0.017)	-0.042** (0.017)	-0.043*** (0.017)	-0.103** (0.052)	-0.045** (0.018)
<i>Distance to East</i>	-0.021 (0.029)	-0.020 (0.031)	-0.023 (0.034)	-0.021 (0.030)	0.044 (0.046)	-0.014 (0.029)
<i>Distance to Saudi Arabia</i>	0.019 (0.024)					
<i>Distance to Iraq</i>		0.017 (0.026)				
<i>Distance to Iran</i>			0.019 (0.029)			
<i>Distance to Kuwait</i>				0.017 (0.024)		
<i>Distance to Venezuela</i>					0.052 (0.039)	
<i>Distance to Israel</i>						0.011 (0.025)
Control variables ^a	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Colony fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>N</i>	174	174	174	174	174	174
Log lik.	-68.79	-68.89	-68.89	-68.86	-68.32	-69.02
Chi-squared	43.66	44.13	44.23	43.97	45.97	44.16

Logit regression results, displaying marginal effects. Dependent variable is probability of military intervention by the UN (*Interv*)

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

^aIncorporates *Intense*, *Internal*, *Interstate*, *Population*, *GDP/capita*, *Trade openness*, *Africa*, *Asia*, and *Europe*

observe the expected costs and circumstances of a realized UN intervention at the beginning, we cannot observe these considerations in the case of non-interventions.

Another practical reason for the importance of *Distance to West* may be given by the chances of success. The likelihood of an operation being successful could be higher in conflicts closer to home (see Jakobsen 1996) because, for example, it is easier and quicker to move troops. In fact, one possible interpretation of why the UN is more likely to intervene in poorer and smaller countries is that the chances for success are higher and the expected costs are lower. With a poorer society comes potentially inferior weapon technology and generally fewer resources for resistance.

Similarly, a smaller population signals a conflict that is easier to oversee and shows less room for expansion, all else being equal.

In the following, we discuss several additional estimations, attempting to filter out whether practical considerations may be responsible for the importance of the distance to the West.

7.3.1 Redefining intervention

To get an idea as to whether costs or success probability could play a role in UNSC decisions, we first take advantage of other forms of UN interventions beyond military operations. It may be understandable that costs and the success chances of a *military* intervention change with geographical distance, but these considerations should not apply when considering other types of interventions, such as imposing economic sanctions, embargoes, calling for an end of hostilities, or sending observer missions. None of these weaker forms of intervention are associated with a substantial commitment of resources. Thus, if *Distance to West* does not play a role in nonmilitary interventions, this would signal that geographical distance matters solely for military interventions, which are associated with a much larger commitment of resources.

Table 6 replicates Table 1, this time including the non-military forms of intervention in the intervention definition (*anyInterv*). We notice that the distance findings are substantially weakened, as *Distance to UK* and *Distance to US* are no longer significant on conventional levels. Only *Distance to West* remains significant at the ten percent level. Thus, geographical proximity may not matter for non-military UN interventions. Another sign that practical considerations may be less important is that *GDP/capita* loses significance in these estimations.

However, categorizing a military peacekeeping intervention in the same way as a call to end hostilities may oversimplify the concept of a UN intervention. It is difficult to relate these types of interventions. For instance, it is impossible to generalize that two, three, or four sanctions represent the equivalent of one military intervention. Although imperfect, Table 7 then ignores military interventions for a moment and solely considers those conflicts in which the UN never intervened militarily. For these cases, we code non-military operations by the UN (*nonmilitaryInterv*) as an intervention, and all conflicts where the UN did not intervene in any form are coded as zeros. In fact, nonmilitary and military interventions show no statistically significant difference in terms of *Distance to West*. Using the usual control variables then shows that distances completely lose their importance, both in terms of significance and magnitude. One interpretation of this finding is that the practical considerations in terms of costs and the probability of success could indeed explain the importance of *Distance to West* for military interventions by the UN.

Another indication for the importance of practical considerations can be found in the remaining coefficients throughout Table 7: population size does not matter for non-military interventions and the sign corresponding to GDP per capita is, in fact, reversed. The weaker types of intervention appear to be more likely in richer states. The signs on *GDP/capita* are positive throughout and reach conventional significance levels in three out of six regressions.

Table 6 Logit regression results, displaying marginal effects

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable: <i>anyInterv</i>						
<i>Distance to China</i>	-0.004 (0.011)					
<i>Distance to France</i>		-0.030 (0.019)				
<i>Distance to Russia</i>			-0.020 (0.022)			
<i>Distance to UK</i>				-0.028 (0.019)		
<i>Distance to US</i>					-0.017 (0.018)	
<i>Distance to West</i>						-0.035* (0.021)
<i>Distance to East</i>						0.014 (0.032)
<i>Intense</i>	0.304*** (0.050)	0.279*** (0.051)	0.292*** (0.050)	0.280*** (0.051)	0.293*** (0.049)	0.274*** (0.050)
<i>Internal</i>	-0.146** (0.066)	-0.153** (0.067)	-0.144** (0.066)	-0.153** (0.067)	-0.155** (0.068)	-0.160** (0.067)
<i>Interstate</i>	0.004 (0.085)	-0.025 (0.090)	-0.011 (0.086)	-0.024 (0.090)	-0.013 (0.089)	-0.026 (0.092)
<i>Population</i>	-0.053** (0.022)	-0.055** (0.023)	-0.058** (0.023)	-0.056** (0.023)	-0.057** (0.024)	-0.053** (0.024)
<i>GDP/capita</i>	0.037 (0.037)	0.003 (0.043)	0.030 (0.035)	0.005 (0.043)	0.018 (0.042)	0.002 (0.044)
<i>Trade openness</i>	-0.013 (0.043)	-0.018 (0.045)	-0.016 (0.044)	-0.018 (0.045)	-0.018 (0.044)	-0.023 (0.045)
<i>Africa</i>	0.010 (0.138)	-0.133 (0.180)	-0.075 (0.179)	-0.096 (0.168)	0.112 (0.149)	0.100 (0.209)
<i>Asia</i>	-0.106 (0.155)	-0.170 (0.147)	-0.208 (0.204)	-0.148 (0.141)	0.044 (0.152)	0.109 (0.304)
<i>Europe</i>	0.088 (0.142)	-0.081 (0.173)	-0.040 (0.213)	-0.054 (0.165)	0.188 (0.127)	0.186 (0.284)
Colony fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>N</i>	174	174	174	174	174	174
Log lik.	-77.75	-76.47	-77.41	-76.65	-77.34	-76.27
Chi-squared	39.81	46.08	40.06	45.41	41.77	48.77

Dependent variable is probability of *any* form of intervention by the UN (*anyInterv*), including sanctions, embargoes, and observer missions

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 7 Logit regression results, displaying marginal effects

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable: <i>nonmilitaryInterv</i>						
<i>Distance to China</i>	-0.005 (0.009)					
<i>Distance to France</i>		-0.000 (0.013)				
<i>Distance to Russia</i>			0.011 (0.018)			
<i>Distance to UK</i>				0.003 (0.014)		
<i>Distance to US</i>					0.021 (0.019)	
<i>Distance to West</i>						-0.004 (0.017)
<i>Distance to East</i>						0.030 (0.028)
<i>Intense</i>	0.175*** (0.059)	0.167*** (0.058)	0.171*** (0.059)	0.170*** (0.058)	0.180*** (0.056)	0.164*** (0.050)
<i>Internal</i>	-0.131** (0.058)	-0.137** (0.055)	-0.142** (0.059)	-0.135** (0.055)	-0.128** (0.053)	-0.161** (0.068)
<i>Interstate</i>	0.024 (0.070)	0.017 (0.074)	0.021 (0.070)	0.022 (0.074)	0.045 (0.071)	0.008 (0.096)
<i>Population</i>	-0.021 (0.015)	-0.016 (0.015)	-0.012 (0.015)	-0.016 (0.015)	-0.008 (0.015)	-0.006 (0.016)
<i>GDP/capita</i>	0.054* (0.028)	0.052 (0.037)	0.057** (0.029)	0.056 (0.036)	0.070** (0.032)	0.055 (0.034)
<i>Trade openness</i>	0.015 (0.032)	0.023 (0.035)	0.026 (0.035)	0.024 (0.035)	0.033 (0.034)	0.029 (0.037)
<i>Africa</i>	-0.042 (0.098)	-0.019 (0.147)	0.035 (0.136)	-0.004 (0.133)	-0.125 (0.120)	0.120 (0.147)
<i>Asia</i>	-0.032 (0.103)	0.023 (0.100)	0.108 (0.167)	0.034 (0.094)	-0.101 (0.125)	0.289 (0.270)
<i>Europe</i>	0.078 (0.097)	0.116 (0.120)	0.210 (0.180)	0.139 (0.118)	0.050 (0.090)	0.372 (0.249)
Colony fixed effects ^a	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>N</i>	134	134	134	134	134	134
Log lik.	-31.59	-31.71	-31.53	-31.69	-30.74	-30.70
Chi-squared	44.38	43.74	46.80	41.74	39.95	47.89

Dependent variable is probability of *non-military* form of intervention by the UN (*nonmilitaryInterv*). These include sanctions, embargoes, and observer missions

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

^aThe dummy for Portuguese colonies is excluded as it predicts failure perfectly

From an econometric perspective, of course, the danger of a selection bias exists in Table 7 because it excludes those conflicts that received military interventions by the UN. Thus, the results displayed in Tables 6 and 7 should be interpreted with caution. The upcoming section will now discuss other aspects in our main estimation that might be related to practical considerations.

7.3.2 *Military opposition, year of conflict, and other interventions*

In further specifications (results displayed in Table A.5 of the online appendix), we consider three additional tests for the importance of practical considerations in UNSC decisions. First, we include the Composite Index of National Capability score from the Correlates of War data set (version 4.0 built on Singer et al. 1972, and Singer 1988). The military strengths and capabilities of the conflict country may well influence the chances of success for a potential UN intervention. Thus, it is important to test whether military strength is a meaningful intervention determinant in itself, but also whether the National Capability Score can explain the distance finding. Indeed, military strength proves to affect the chances of intervention negatively, although this finding is not statistically significant on conventional levels. Beyond that, the coefficient on *Distance to West* remains virtually unchanged.

Second, we add a basic time trend in our main estimation, incorporating the beginning year of the conflict. As both weapons' and information technology has advanced rapidly over the past decades, a potential intervention today could be cheaper and easier to plan, but it may also be easier to foresee the chances of success. However, any trend parameters remain firmly insignificant throughout our estimations. Similarly, including a squared time trend does not appear to matter.

Finally, considerations regarding costs and success probabilities may be reflected in both the number of ongoing interventions by the UN at the beginning of the conflict and whether the conflict country has been subject to a previous military intervention. With more military commitments already in progress, budget constraints may become more binding, therefore lowering the chances of starting a new operation. Interestingly, the number of current interventions appears to have a *positive* effect on intervention decisions.

In terms of success probability, a previous intervention may be helpful for knowing the country and the specific conflict at stake. In addition, previously installed facilities or local contacts from the previous operations could be employed. However, whether the conflict country received a UNSC intervention previously has no statistically significant impact. In addition, the importance of *Distance to West* remains once again robust to these extensions.

8 Robustness checks

Beyond the possible explanations of the importance for distance from the West, we also consider several robustness checks for our main estimation of Table 1, column (6). Specifically, we check for additional spatial components in our main model, but also acknowledge the relationship between the conflict country and the UN, the

conflict duration, and the religious composition of the conflict country. Even though the empirical results of these estimations, together with a more detailed explanation, are referred to the [Online Appendix](#), we want to briefly summarize the findings.

First, we construct a spatial cross-section in which each observation unit is a country. Similarly, we collapse the explanatory variables to obtain one observation per country (details in the [Online Appendix](#)). This methodology then produces a final sample of 94 countries and the classic non-spatial Probit model provides strong support for our initial distance findings. In addition, we find no clear evidence for the presence of spatial error autocorrelation (following Kelejian and Prucha 2001, in using the generalized Moran's I statistic). Thus, it is unlikely that additional neighborhood aspects are confounding our results. A deeper discussion can be found in the online appendix surrounding Table A.4.

Finally, we also test for other attributes of the conflict countries. Specifically, we consider whether UN and UNSC (nonpermanent) membership at the beginning of the conflict has any influence on the probability to intervene. However, we find no evidence for these factors and the distance findings remain virtually unchanged in those specifications (Table A.5, columns 5 and 6). Similarly, adding the religious composition of a country, measured by the fraction of Catholics, Muslims, and Protestants, does not alter our findings and remains statistically insignificant on conventional levels.

All of the results sketched in this section are available in the [Online Appendix](#) with a more detailed description.

9 Concluding remarks

Political decisions are usually made behind closed doors, and many times their true intentions are difficult to expose. The decisions of the United Nations Security Council to intervene militarily in a conflict are no exception to this statement. This paper builds on an insightful stream of research by trying to discover the true aspects associated with these interventions. Our findings indicate that military interventions are more likely in countries that are located closer to the three Western permanent UNSC members (France, the UK, and the US), but also in poorer and smaller countries.¹⁰

In theory, the geographical distance to the deciding powers in the Council should not be a significant factor behind UNSC intervention decisions. Distance may well be justifiable for intervention decisions by single countries or regional organizations because their focus lies on protecting domestic borders. However, the United Nations emphasizes its equal commitment to all 193 member states. Our most complete estimations suggest that for every 1,000 kilometers of distance to the closest Western permanent member, the probability of a military UNSC intervention decreases by approximately 4 percent. In the case of Malaysia or Indonesia, this represents a reduction of almost 42 – 43 percentage points, compared to a country bordering one of the

¹⁰Using the individual distances to France, the UK, or the US produces almost identical results. Thus, the importance of geographical distance cannot be traced back to the distance to one of these countries alone.

three Western powers (e.g., Mexico or Spain). Interestingly, the distance to the Eastern permanent members (China and Russia) does not matter. It is also noteworthy that we do not find any intervention preferences along the lines of continents.

There are, of course, numerous potentially alternative explanations, and the paper tests for a variety of them. Among these, we generally distinguish between political, economic, and practical aspects. In terms of politics, we take into account the Cold War period, the extraordinary role of the European conflicts (the Yugoslavian Wars and the formation of the post-Soviet Union states), the regime form, and the affinity scores in UN voting behavior. None of these are able to explain the distance finding. As for independent effects, we find that interventions are more likely in less democratic regimes. Regarding economic reasons, we incorporate bilateral trade relationships between the conflict country and the permanent members, foreign aid flows, and the distance to major oil suppliers. Again, none of these aspects are able to account for the importance of geographical distance.

However, we find evidence for the importance of practical considerations from additional estimations, where we broaden the intervention definition to include non-military actions (i.e., embargoes, sanctions, or establishing observer missions). Beyond the difference in the severity of an intervention, which is difficult to quantify, these weaker forms of intervention share a substantially lower level of commitment, both in terms of personnel and general resources. Indeed, we find that once we define intervention more broadly, the distance finding weakens. In fact, a hypothetical exercise in disregarding those conflicts that received military interventions by the UNSC produces different results. In these estimations, neither the geographical distance to the West nor country size nor GDP per capita decrease the intervention probability. If anything, it appears as if these weaker intervention forms are more likely to happen in *richer* nations. These results add to the notion that it is only *military* intervention decisions by the UNSC that are likely to be biased geographically.

Of course, these final estimations must be interpreted with caution. Whether the UN sends military troops for peacekeeping or imposes an embargo constitutes a major difference in commitment level. Thus, pooling these actions may oversimplify the question and wash out these important differences. Similarly, disregarding the conflicts that were subject to UN military interventions at some point could introduce a selection bias.

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